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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN, EUR/ACE, DRL  
EUR/CACEN FOR EUGENIA SIDEREAS AND MARGARET PAWICK

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [AM](#)  
SUBJECT: NEW REGISTRATION PROCEDURE TRIMS NUMBER OF  
POLITICAL PARTIES

¶1. (U) Sensitive But Unclassified. Please treat  
accordingly - not for internet distribution.

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SUMMARY  
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¶2. (SBU) Half the previous number of political  
parties will operate in Armenia following the  
implementation of new legislation requiring a one-  
time re-registration with the Ministry of Justice.  
Fifty-three parties registered with the government  
ahead of the November 18 re-registration deadline,  
compared to 116 parties previously registered. The  
Government denied re-registration to eight parties.  
Two opposition bloc parties (including Armenia's  
oldest political party, the Social Hunchakian Party)  
were denied registration on technical grounds, with  
little legal recourse for appeal. End summary.

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FEWER PARTIES APPLY FOR RE-REGISTRATION  
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¶3. (U) Fifty-three parties submitted applications as  
part of new GOAM legislation requiring a one-time re-  
registration of political parties by late November  
2003. The new legislation required the Ministry of  
Justice to examine all party charters and by-laws to  
ensure they comply with domestic legislation  
governing political organizations. Significantly  
fewer parties applied to re-register than the 116  
parties who were previously part of the government's  
official roster. The law, adopted in November 2002,  
was promoted as a means of "sifting out" defunct  
parties.

¶4. (SBU) Experts attribute the notably lower number  
of applications to the recent consolidation of a  
number of minor parties. In addition, several  
unsuccessful presidential and parliamentary  
candidates did not re-register their "one-man"  
parties following their electoral defeats in 2003.  
They instead joined the ranks of other parties or  
used the re-registration process as an occasion to  
publicly exit politics. International organizations  
like the OSCE did not openly criticize the first  
stage of the re-registration process. Parties could  
easily access guidelines for the procedure in  
nationwide newspapers and observers did not cite  
overt obstacles designed to block specific parties.

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MOJ DENIES HUNCHAKS, SOCIAL DEMOCRATS  
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¶5. (SBU) The Ministry of Justice recently announced  
that it would deny registration to eight parties who  
had applied for re-registration. Six of the parties  
(including the "Armenian Royalists") were in clear  
violation of Armenian laws forbidding parties that  
advocate non-democratic forms of government or that  
fall short of the required number of supporters.

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ALLEGED FOREIGN TIES  
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¶6. (SBU) Local media and opposition leaders noted  
the Ministry of Justice's decision to deny re-  
registration to the Hunchakian and Social Democratic  
Parties. Both parties, who joined the opposition  
Justice Bloc in mid-2003, denounced the decision as  
a move to fragment the opposition and drive their  
supporters toward the governing coalition. The GOAM  
responded saying the parties were not registered due  
to non-compliance with a number of regulations  
including laws forbidding parties with "foreign"  
sponsorship.

17. (SBU) Note: The Social Hunchakian Party was founded in 1887 and was especially active among Diaspora Armenians in the Middle East and the United States during the Soviet era. The party still enjoys relatively high prestige within the U.S. Diaspora community, especially among retired Armenian-Americans. Individuals close to the party suspect that the majority of financial support for the party comes from abroad. The party split in the mid-90s; the GOAM did not deny the spin-off Social-Democratic-Hunchakian-Party its registration application. End note.

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NO APPEAL POSSIBLE?  
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18. (U) The new registration process does not specify procedures for appeal once a party's application is denied. Social Hunchakian and Social Democratic Party leaders told us December 22 that they would take their case to court unless the National Assembly adopted an addendum to the registration procedure by the end of the year. A special National Assembly session on December 25 includes this issue on the agenda but it is unclear to what extent parliamentarians support the move.

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COMMENT  
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19. (SBU) While it remains unclear whether the National Assembly will address the concerns of the Hunchakian and Social Democratic parties, the registration process does not appear to have been overly biased against the opposition bloc. Representatives of the GOAM executive branch have been especially responsive to opposition concerns, spearheading the effort to amend the law. Whether the National Assembly decides to create an appeals process for political parties will be an important litmus test for the legislature's commitment to democratic ideals. End comment.  
WALKER